
To: Business, Enterprise and Economy Scrutiny Board (3)

Date: 26th June 2019

Subject: Coventry Local Air Quality Action Plan

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To brief the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) on the current position in relation to the Coventry Local Air Quality Action Plan.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) are recommended to:
- 1) Note the content of the report.
 - 2) Identify any recommendations for the appropriate Cabinet Member.

3 Information/Background

- 3.1 Coventry has been identified by Government as one of around 40 towns and cities in the UK where roadside nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) levels are likely to exceed legal limits by 2021. The Government issued a Direction instructing the City Council to develop and submit a Local Air Quality Action Plan setting out how the Council intended to reduce NO₂ levels within the city below legal limits in the shortest possible time. Progress reports on the development of the Action Plan were provided to Scrutiny Board in July 2018 and November 2018.
- 3.2 The Action Plan, outlining the preferred package of measures that would achieve the objective of reducing NO₂ levels, and which did not propose a Clean Air Zone, was approved by the Council's Cabinet on 12th February 2019 and submitted to Government. An update on the Action Plan was provided to Scrutiny Board on 5th April 2019, and Scrutiny Board requested that a further report be brought back for consideration once Government feedback on the Action Plan had been properly reviewed.
- 3.3 Government responded to the submitted Action Plan on 26th March with a new Direction imposing the following duties upon the Council:
- 3.3.1 *Duty to implement the benchmark option [this being the implementation of a Clean Air Zone (CAZ) Category D as set out in the LAQAP submission] – to achieve compliance with the legal limit for nitrogen dioxide by 2023 at the latest.*
 - 3.3.2 *Duty to submit additional documentation – covering revised air quality modelling by 14th June at the latest. This modelling should demonstrate the applicable class of a charging CAZ, and outline the additional measures that would be required to achieve compliance in the shortest possible time.*
 - 3.3.3 *Duty to prepare and submit a full business case – by 27th September 2019 at the latest.*

- 3.4 A Clean Air Zone Category D would result in a charge being imposed upon non-compliant vehicles entering the CAZ, including all categories of vehicle (bus, taxi, vans, lorries, motorcycles and cars). The Council's Cabinet has consistently opposed the principle of putting a CAZ in place in the city, and this stance has been supported by Scrutiny Board in their previous discussions.
- 3.5 The Council is currently complying with the latest Direction by undertaking additional air quality modelling work testing different options for the Action Plan. This will result in an updated Action Plan that will be submitted to Government later this year. The aim remains to deliver an Action Plan that achieves the reduction in NO₂ levels in the shortest possible time without the need for the imposition of a CAZ.
- 3.6 The Holyhead Road route into the city is the one that records the highest levels of NO₂. Therefore, the Council is developing a revised package of measures that focusses upon reducing traffic flows on Holyhead Road, including removing a pinch point at Spon End to provide greater capacity on the parallel route into the city from the west. Coundon Road would remain open at the level crossing, with Upper Hill Street opened out onto the ring road to enable the closure of Barras Lane and the removal of the existing traffic signals at the Holyhead Road / Barras Lane junction. These measures would be complemented by investment in improved cycle routes, travel planning and traffic management.
- 3.7 In addition, the Council is investing heavily, using Government grant, in upgrading the bus fleet, supporting a transition to electric taxis, and in encouraging the uptake of electric cars by extending the network of charging points across the city.
- 3.8 The Council's strategy is therefore to improve air quality in the city by upgrading the fleet of vehicles operating within the city, encouraging modal shift away from the car for local journeys, and to implement traffic management measures to encourage traffic away from the most polluted areas of the city whilst ensuring that displaced traffic does not result in NO₂ levels being breached on other routes.
- 3.9 The process therefore has involved the submission of the updated evidence, based on the additional air quality modelling work testing a variety of additional measures, as well as variants on the Clean Air Zone approach. This evidence was submitted on 14th June to Government, with some further supplementary technical reports being submitted to Government by the 28th June.
- 3.10 Once Government feedback on this submitted evidence has been received, which is expected to be during July, then the Council will publish, for consultation, the updated Local Air Quality Action Plan. The consultation feedback will help to refine the proposals outlined in the Action Plan, and a Full Business Case will then be submitted to Government later in the year outlining the precise funding requirement being sought by the Council to deliver the measures contained in the Action Plan.
- 3.11 Under the current Direction, the Government requires submission of the Full Business Case by 27th September, but the ability of the Council to comply with this date will depend upon the nature of the feedback received from Government on the updated evidence submission, the timing of that feedback, and the consequential impact on the consultation programme. If necessary, the Council will make representation to Government seeking a review of this submission date.
- 3.12 The Government has agreed to issue additional grant funding of £500,000 to support the Council in the preparation of the Full Business Case. In addition, a further £4.5 million of grant funding has been made available to the Council, linked to the work required should a Clean Air Zone be required. Whilst this funding has been accepted by the Council, as reported to Council on 18th June, to comply with Government funding procedures, it is being held on account pending the outcome of the Action Plan development work.

3.13 In relation to a Clean Air Zone, there has been significant publicity around the possibility of a charging CAZ being introduced in the city. The Council's consistent view has been that a charging CAZ is unnecessary, and that the NO₂ levels in the city can be reduced below legal limits through a range of alternative measures, as outlined above. This position has not changed.

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